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SUBJECT: PACE REPORT HIGHLIGHTS CONCERNS ABOUT AZERBAIJAN'S
PRE-ELECTION POLITICAL CLIMATE

Classified By: Ambassador Anne E. Derse for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

¶1. (SBU) On June 24, the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe (PACE) approved resolution 1614, which serves as a "scorecard" on the state of Azerbaijan's democratic institutions. The resolution's overall tone is critical of Azerbaijan's track record, citing the "deteriorating" human rights environment and the conditions in the run up to the October Presidential election. The resolution also calls on the GOAJ to release several "political prisoners." The Azerbaijani delegation to PACE and other parties appear, however, to have negotiated some of the wording, which highlighted some of Azerbaijan's positive progress. For example, the resolution notes that a number of rule of law and democracy reforms are underway.

¶2. (SBU) The resolution's final article focuses on Nagorno-Karabakh (NK), noting that "sustainable democratic development will be extremely difficult in Azerbaijan as long as the country's territorial integrity has not been restored." New Azerbaijan Party (YAP) member and MP Aydin Mirzazadeh publicly highlighted that this was a positive aspect of the resolution because for the first time, PACE is acknowledging the link between the resolution of NK and the ability to move forward with democratic reforms.

¶3. (SBU) The basis for Resolution 1614's recommendations is a report by the PACE co-rapporteurs for Azerbaijan, Andres Herkel and Evguenia Jivkova. The executive summary of the co-rapporteurs report highlighted "great concern about the deteriorating human rights situation," "the harassment and intimidation" of journalists, and called on the GOAJ to take three steps in the run up to the presidential election: ensuring balanced election commissions with the capacity for handling complaints, equal and free access to media for all candidates, and guaranteeing the opposition's right to hold public rallies.

¶4. (SBU) The head of the Azerbaijani PACE delegation, Samad Seyidov, publicly said the document was "balanced," noting that there are some "true points," but some "issues" are "not appropriate to Azerbaijan's national interests." The initial opposition reaction to the PACE resolution is positive, but National Unity Movement chief Lala Shovket and Democratic Party head Sardar Jalaloglu raised questions about PACE's political will to hold the GOAJ responsible to its Council of Europe commitments. There has been only minimal coverage of the PACE resolution in local television stations, where the majority of Azerbaijanis get their news. Only the pro-government Lider TV picked up the story.

15. (C) In a July 2 meeting with the Ambassador, Azerbaijani human rights activists who had been to the PACE meeting in Strasbourg expressed their appreciation for the original PACE report, but their disappointment with the tone of the Strasbourg meeting and with the final resolution. They explained that about ten PACE members, who had previously been guests of the Azerbaijani parliament in Baku, made positive speeches in support of Azerbaijan and its progress on democratic development. The human rights activists hinted that Europe's growing desire for Azerbaijani gas supplies may also have influenced the outcome of this PACE hearing. They also felt that the reaction of Azerbaijan's PACE delegation was dismissive of the PACE recommendations, particularly regarding the release of sick "political prisoners." Several activists expressed the need for increased international pressure on the Azerbaijani Government to ensure its compliance with the PACE resolution.

16. (C) In an July 2 lunch with Baku-based Ambassadors immediately before his meeting with President Aliyev, PACE President Lluís Maria De Puig said that PACE "could not accept the current political realities" in Azerbaijan, and sought to convince Azerbaijan "to make great changes." To that end, in his afternoon meeting with President Aliyev he said he would seek to convince him that he must release journalists from prison and hold free and fair Presidential elections. He said that in total, PACE had issued seven resolutions critical of Azerbaijan, and that nothing much had changed for the better. However, if PACE were not satisfied with the upcoming Presidential elections, its patience would come to an end, and it could well impose sanctions on Azerbaijan or not recognize its representatives in

Parliament. However, he added that "PACE is not naive," realizing that true change "would take time."

17. (C) Comment: The Embassy believes the timing and substance of the PACE report is valuable in laying down an official marker on the state of Azerbaijan's democratic institutions. It remains to be seen how much consideration senior GOAJ officials will give to the report. Embassy will be get and report on today's PACE President Lluís Maria De Puig - President Aliyev meeting.
DERSE